

Want better employees? Get somebody else to rate their personalities, study suggests

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(Phys.org)—Businesses will get more accurate assessments of potential and current employees if they do away with self-rated personality tests and ask those being assessed to find someone else to rate them, suggest results from a new study.

Previous job performance studies have shown that outsiders are best at rating an individual's personality in terms of how they work on the job. But [observers](#) in these studies have always been co-workers.

The recent paper by Prof. Brian Connelly, who is cross-appointed to the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management and the University of Toronto Scarborough, and Prof. Ute Hülshager of Maastricht University, is the first to delve into whether co-workers are the best judges of personality because they are more familiar with a job's requirements and know the individual in a work context, or whether any outside observer can be a good judge.

Taking results from a German-based study of 111 employees who self-rated and then were rated by 106 personal acquaintances (including family members) and 102 co-workers, the paper found both types of outside observers gave equally fair evaluations of other people.

"It's not so much that observers are thinking only about the one particular context that the evaluation is for, but it's more that they have a less clouded view of a person," says Prof. Connelly.

The study, published in the *Journal of Personality*, also found that people who overestimated their [agreeableness](#) and conscientiousness (the most predictive for performance) performed worse on the job than those who did not overestimate these traits. This is something Prof. Connelly compares to the "Michael Scott" phenomenon, referring to the lead character on the popular television show *The Office*, who has little self-awareness or insight into why those working for him do not enjoy their jobs more.

Despite these findings, self-rated vs. observer-rated personality assessments are the norm at organizations that use [personality tests](#) as an evaluation tool.

"One possible thing would be for those applying for jobs to nominate someone else to rate their personality rather than doing it themselves, and then you might have a better workforce," says Prof. Connelly.

Observer-rated [personality](#) measures may also be more useful for current [employees](#) getting developmental feedback on the job.

"If we're basing all the responses on self-reports, which is the norm, rather than having somebody else giving them the feedback, then we may be handing people's biased perceptions right back to them," says Prof. Connelly.

Provided by University of Toronto

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